

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR JONAH CRABS

The department would like to make changes to the commercial Jonah crab fishery in response to Addendum II to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Jonah Crab. ASMFC is requiring the management measures to be in place by January 1, 2018.

Addendum II permits claw harvest coastwide. Specifically, the Addendum allows Jonah crab fishermen to detach and harvest claws at sea, with a required minimum claw length of 2.75" (from the elbow to the tip of the bottom claw) if the volume of claws landed is greater than five gallons. Claw landings less than five gallons do not have to meet the minimum claw length standard. Fishermen may also harvest whole crabs which meet the 4.75" minimum carapace width. Maryland fisherman typically harvest Jonah crabs greater than 5.5 inches and the claw length is about 3 inches or greater. The reason for the 2.75" minimum length is to ensure that the harvest of female crab claws will be minimal. Female Jonah crabs are smaller than males and the minimum claw length provides assurance that the claws will be taken from male crabs.

Addendum II also establishes a definition of bycatch in the Jonah crab fishery, whereby the total pounds of Jonah crabs caught as bycatch must weigh less than the total amount of the targeted species at all times during a fishing trip.

Changes to the Current Commercial Fishery:

- Eliminates the requirement for the claw landing permit
- No qualification needed to harvest claws
- New size limit for claws if harvesting over 5 gallons and removing claws at sea
- No size limit for claws if you harvest under 5 gallons or if you don't remove the claws until after you land
- Bycatch rules — Limited to 1000 whole Jonah crabs or 2000 Jonah crab claws if you harvest Jonah crabs with gear other than federally tagged lobster traps. Jonah crab claws harvested must weigh less than the targeted species at all times.
- No changes for harvesters with federally tagged lobster traps